

Officer: Felons policy unfair to black cops

RULE 47 | Cop is warned after letting convicted man drive car

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An African-American Chicago Police officer contends that a rule barring cops from associating with criminals discriminates against black officers.

The officer argues the rule is more restrictive on black officers because of the disproportionate number of African Americans who have had contact with the criminal justice system.

Last month, a supervisor warned Officer Sylvia Broadway she might have violated department rules — asking if she knew that a man driving her car was a convicted felon.

Broadway, a 13-year veteran in the Wentworth District, said she was unaware the man was a felon until she asked him later.

The department is enforcing a "policy that appears to have bias overtones against a specific racial group, namely African Americans," she said to the supervisor in a memo. "It is as though a deliberate trap has been set for African-American police officers."

Some 8.4 percent of all black males ages 25 to 29 were in the U.S. prison population, according to a 2004 Bureau of Justice Statistics report, compared with 2.5 percent of Hispanic males that age, and 1.2 percent of white males.

Broadway says she does not want to lose her job or face discipline over the Police Department's Rule 47, which bars officers from associating with anyone convicted of a felony or a misdemeanor.

She also contends Rule 47 conflicts with the U.S. Constitution, discriminating against convicted criminals who paid their debt to society. In an interview, she said Rule 47 is void because the Police Board passed a different set of rules in 1987 that did not include it.

'No one stopped him'

On Sept. 11, Broadway was approached by her watch commander. He informed her a convicted felon had driven her car, which was parked near 57th and Calumet. She said she had known the man about seven months, and was unaware of his criminal record. He worked for a construction firm, she said.

"No one stopped him or detained him on a traffic stop," Broadway told the Sun-Times. "The car was parked at that location where they encountered him and a host of other people." She said she

did not know how officers associated him with her car.

The department is investigating, police spokeswoman Monique Bond said.

Rule 47 was originally designed to break up cozy relationships between cops and the mob. It's been in the headlines a few times in the past decade.

'He was a friend'

In 1997, police Supt. Matt Rodriguez retired because of his association with an ex-con, telling reporters: "I didn't look on him as Frank the felon. He was a friend."

In 2008, former Chicago Police Cmdr. Michael Acosta was sentenced to five months in prison after admitting to stealing \$4,000 meant for a ceremony honoring police officers. Secret tapes also revealed a close relationship between Acosta and convicted felon John "Quarters" Boyle — a Rule 47 violation, the FBI said.

Pat Hill, executive director of the African American Police League, said she backs Broadway, noting she has not been formally disciplined.

Fraternal Order of Police President Mark Donahue said he does not have a problem with the rule. He said the department does not discipline officers whose family members have criminal records. "The FOP has accepted Rule 47," he said.